

Goodbye to Universal Development and Call for Diversified, Democratic Sufficiency and Frugality

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Buch-Hansen, Mogens

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Good bye to universal development and call for diversified, democratic sufficiency and frugality.

The need to re-conceptualizing development and revitalizing development studies

By Mogens Buch-Hansen

What was once called development research is, in fact, an attempt at both the theory and practice of cosmopolitanism. By cosmopolitanism I mean the effort to make the world a more hospitable place for all its citizens. But I also believe that the language, the semiotics of development today is an obstacle to engaging in the theory and practice of cosmopolitanism.

(Wolfgang Sachs 2007)

Abstract

This article argues for the need to re-conceptualize development and by implication revitalize development studies with a view of introducing culturally diversified sufficiency livelihoods to be democratically spread to all citizens of the planet. The new development concept should allow for the expected global population of 9 to 11 billion by 2050 to live within the ecological finite world of natural resources and life supporting ecosystems. The concept of development has been vividly debated since it in the post II World War order became the Western countries' mantra of human progress and modernisation, promising the undeveloped Third World countries materialistic welfare similarly to the developed countries. Despite the promises, the poorest countries keep falling further behind, at the same time as the rapidly growing emerging economies that all together contain more than half of the world population, during the last couples of decades adds up to already existing mass consumerism. At the same time the new big emerging economies are shaking the established North-South hegemonic world order based in the linear concept of development. This creates two new scenarios. One is the rapidly growing consumption of natural resources and challenges to the global ecosystems, not least the accumulation of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere that with a global population of 9-11 billion by the middle of this Century will 'probably exceed all possible measures of available resources and assessments of limits to the capacity to absorb impacts' (UNEP 2011). The second scenario is the changing world order based in political power from rapid economic growth in the new emerging economies. With the quest for democratically sharing future room for development within a finite ecological planet this calls for radical new thinking about development in terms of sufficiency, frugality and sustainability. The contextual and interdisciplinary approach of development studies to the study of the variety of constraints to successful development experiences can play a pertinent role in the necessary redefinition of development in rich and poor countries. This, however, implies that the economics of the re-conceptualized development takes its point of departure in the realities of an ecological finite world.

Introduction

The concept of development that has been dominating the global North-South relationships since the end of II World War is misleading as it promises to spread worldwide the production and consumer model of the Western world, a promise that is beyond the 1960s and 1970s 'Cornucopian-New Malthusian' debate on the ingenuity of mankind versus resource depletion and population increase (Boserup 1976) (Ehrlich 1968) (Ehrlich, Ehrlich 1996) (Meadows, Meadows 1972) (Boserup 1981) (Tiffen, International Institute for Environment and Development. 1994). The annual Global State of the Environment reports, reports from the World Watch Institute and a big number of other contemporary reports are describing the rapidly deteriorating natural resources and life supporting ecosystems. UNEP recently published a report on the growing consumption of natural resources and environmental impacts of global production and consumption that estimate that humanity could consume 140 billion tons of minerals, ores, fossil fuels and biomass per year in 2050 – three times more than at present – unless the economic growth rate is 'decoupled' from the rate of natural resource consumption. Tim Jackson has in his 2009 book on 'Prosperity Without Growth – Economics for a Finite Planet' calculated the scenarios for future resource use with a global population growing to 9-11 billion by the middle of this Century, the growing consumerism in the emerging economies and a quest for democratic share of future economic development and materialistic welfare. With 'business as usual' the global economy should be 15 times the size of today that already has ecological footprints exceeding the capacity of the planet (Jackson 2009, p. 13). If this is going to be achieved together with a realistic scenario of a continued moderate economic growth in the rich developed countries, technologies should be invented that allows the carbon intensity per produced monetary unit to be 130 lower than it is today in order to stay within the recommendation of the IPCC to avoid unmanageable climate changes (Jackson 2009), p. 81).

This article will argue for the urgency to reconsider the old 'Cornucopian-New Malthusian' debate as human ingenuity somehow managed to develop substitutes for scarce resources. The new challenge is to equally find substitutes to rapidly deteriorating life supporting ecosystems and services, such as a stable climate, pollination, the global water balance, aquatic life, soil fertility, etc. The pertinent question: is this possible?

Based on the above analyses, the article will argue that the ecological challenges simply force us to declare the present concept of development null and void and define a new concept that is democratically implementable within a finite ecological world. The concept of development as a normative concept of human progress and modernisation has been vividly debated, also in FDS (Marcussen 2008, Mkandawire 2008, Nustad 2001, Simon 2005) since it became the centre of attention for development economics, development studies and development assistance after the Second World War. Although there have been major disagreements on whether development actually created progress and prosperity or dependency and poverty or it did not at all address the cultural diversification and human aspirations pertaining to the societies they were supposed to address, the underlying perception of development was that it was something that could or should (unavoidably) be spread to the global population. This article concurs with that perception but argues for the need of re-conceptualising development as a normative concept, rather than rejecting it.

The idea of development is described as long back as by the Greek philosopher Aristotle and as such the idea is much older, as he described the 'naturalistic' view of development as changes in the living nature from conception, birth, growth, maturing and death as repeated cycles of changes. This

later was given a Christian reinterpretation by Saint Augustine's linear view of history (Rist 1997, p. 34). The latter's linear view of history was given fresh impetus during the Enlightenment by Buffin and Condorset (Corbridge 1998), p. 139). Hence, the perception of development as a linear historical process became ingrained in the Western culture with roots in the Enlightenment. However, it was with the modernisation theory, notably formulated by Walt Rostow in his anti-communist manifest from 1956 (Rostow 1960), that development, during the cold war after the II World War, became a Western world mantra, distinguishing itself from the communist (second) world and the underdeveloped Third World. Although the modernisation theories were mainly focussed on establishing development economics, to a large degree based in John Maynard Keynes' works on effective demand to diminish unemployment and create economic growth, the rich literature in modernisation theories described and analysed the political, cultural, social and institutional conditions for economic growth, which were so radically different in the developing countries¹. Also the late development of Eastern Europe drew the attention of modernisation theorists, such as Rosenstein-Rodan (Rostow, Rosenstein-Rodan 1957), Ragnar Nurkse (Kattel, Kregel et al. 2009) and Alexander Gerschenkron (Gerschenkron 1966). However, Hirschman (Hirschman 1969) and others description of the dual economy in the developing countries, the traditional, low productivity, religious based economy versus the modern, secular high productivity economy, created the basis for the modernisation concept of development – the transition from backwardness and superstition to modernity and enlightenment. Development became institutionalised and promoted through development assistance (ODA) as the practical means and the concept of development as an ideological icon of superiority.

However, after the great optimism of the possibility of spreading development worldwide, supported by the UN Development Decades of the 1960s and 1970s and the mushrooming of development assistance agencies during the same period, the concept of development, as an all embracing concept of human progress, has been under serious attacks from many corners. Instead of being seen as a tool for modernization and progress it was seen by its critiques as a tool for creating underdevelopment and dependency in the Third World². The first attacks, completely neglecting the concept of development, came from the neo-liberal counterrevolution from the late 1970s and during the 1980s. Later, during the last decades of the First Millennium, the post-development theories claimed that development had all failed as strongly advocated by the following quotes from Escobar and Thomas:

...that the 'dream' of development which emerged after the Second World War was progressively turned into a nightmare....instead of the kingdom of abundance promised by theorists in the 1950s, the discourse and strategy of development produced its opposite: massive underdevelopment and impoverishment, untold exploitation and oppression. The debt crisis, the Sahelian famine, increasing poverty, malnutrition, and violence are only the most pathetic signs of failure of forty years of development (Escobar 1995), p. 4)

Voices from the 'post-development' school claim that, at best, development has failed, or at worst it was always a 'hoax', designed to cover up violent damage being done to the so-called 'developing' world and its people (Allen, Thomas et al. 2000), p. 3).

¹ The first periodical on development studies: Economic Development and Cultural Change, was established in 1952.

² Norwegian scholars in development have provided excellent overviews of development theories and the role of development assistance since the Second World War. See Stokke, O. 2009. For a comprehensive collection of original texts on development (in its many versions) and its critiques from the development epoch until today, see: (Bull, Bøås 2010)

The impasse of development theories in the 1980s and the lack of actual progress in development after two consecutive UN declared decades of development in the 1960s and 1970s gave way for the neo-conservative political forces with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as prominent front figures, to let neo-liberal growth oriented economies dominate the scene. As a US representative to the Asian Development Bank announced that “the United States completely rejects the idea that there is such a thing as ‘development’” (Mkandawire 2001). As Stuart Corbridge mentions: “the right, suitably encouraged by the impasse in radical development thinking, has pushed ahead with its declaration of a Washington Consensus (Corbridge 1998), p. 138). The Washington institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, became the main proponents of neo-liberal economics³ pursued through the political tools of the Washington Consensus.

While the results of the official development efforts in Africa and to some extent in Latin America and Asia were rather disappointing, the Asian Tigers (South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and (to some extent) Indonesia) during the 1980s and early 1990s showed remarkable economic growth rates, mainly through export-led industrialisation. The free market mechanisms promoted by the active Asian developmental states (sometimes labelled Neostatism (Payne, Phillips 2010)) led the Washington institutions to the conclusion that the engine of growth in these economies was not the state but the private sector and hence used them as successful cases of their promotion of neo-liberal economies. As concluded by Payne and Phillips:

The 1993 World Bank report entitled *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*, a landmark publication emblematic of the clumsy and faltering way in which the story of the East Asian miracle was ‘spun’ so as to remain within the parameters of the neoliberal orthodoxy (Payne, Phillips 2010), p. 99)

The fact of the matter is that many former poor developing countries, notably China, India, Brazil and countries in East and Southeast Asia, ventured into a process of rapid economic growth⁴. As these mega countries together contain almost half of the global population, their rapid economic growth is significant in two ways: Their economic strength result in a demand for political influence and hence challenges the established world order of the rich and developed world dominating the global agenda vis-à-vis the underdeveloped, poor Third World. Secondly, the rapid increasing consumerism of these emerging economies challenges an ecologically finite world. The issue of global environmental justice has become a pertinent issue in the search for a new world order. This together with the undeniable huge pressure on the global ecosystems in coping with the growing resource utilization and pollution (including greenhouses gases) requires new thinking.

It is, therefore, the aim of this article to argue for the need to re-conceptualize development and revitalize the interdisciplinary development studies, including ecological economics, to assist in the process of defining human progress and life satisfaction and analyse how it can be democratically⁵ implemented within the planet’s frame of natural resource endowments and ecosystems’ capacities. Development has through the various epochs been a normative concept signifying the good or the

³ I use the concept of neo-liberal economics as defined by David Harvey (Harvey 2005)). I am, however, aware that many economists working according to this paradigm don’t consider themselves as neo-liberal economists.

⁴ As shown by Palat it is notably China, India and East Asia that has grown rapidly while the rest of the major regions in the Third World has fallen further behind. However, this growth has been followed by increasing inequalities within these countries and subsequently the rise of a great spender consumer class (Palat 2009)

⁵ Democracy comes from the Greek word *demokratia* combined by *demos*: people and *kratein*: govern, meaning peoples right to govern and as such pursuing equity in opposition to the power of money

bad depending on your point of view. A redefined concept must reflect a culturally diversified prosperity of sufficiency within the reality of an ecological finite world. It will be argued that the epistemological power of the interdisciplinary development studies can be instrumental in analysing the conditions for implementing it globally.

Economic growth, the changing world order and its challenges to a finite world

The development epoch from the early 1950s to the late 1970s and the following neo-liberal epoch, dominating the rest of the Millennium, did in general not bring development in terms of increased material wealth, education and health to the poor (and especially the poorest) countries, many of which only became poorer as their populations were increasing (Murshed, et. al. 2000). Especially during the neo-liberal epoch, the further economic growth in the rich countries not only led to increased inequality between rich and poor, but to a deterioration of natural resources globally, due to increasing worldwide consumerism (Weisbrot 2002). Since the 1990s, however, the increase in global consumerism now comes from the new middle classes in some of the former developing countries. The Wuppertal Institute estimates that only 53% of the global consumer class lives in industrial countries, while 47% are new consumers from the emergent economies. China has today almost as many big consumers as USA, while in China they only represent about 10% of the population. The Wuppertal Institute estimates that one third of the global consumer class live in USA, China and India (Sachs 2007). Also according to the World Bank, the emerging economies will grow faster in the immediate future and their demand for decision power in the global institutions will increase (World Bank 2011).

The recently published UNEP report: Decoupling Natural Resource Use and Environmental Impacts from Economic Growth points to the enormous figures on consumption of natural resources and environmental impacts of global production and consumption with an increasing population towards the middle of this Century. These figures reflect the scenario of 'business as usual' with developed countries proceeding as they have for the last three decades and the rest of the world continues the current trend to catch up (UNEP 2011). However, the report also describes how the increased demands for material goods, particularly in China, India, Brazil and other newly emerging economies resulted in the total resource use grew eight-fold, from 6 billion tons in 1900 to 49 billion tons in 2000. It is now estimated at up to 59 billion tons (ibid). Subsequently the total consumption of 140 billion tons in 2050, which is "probably exceeding all possible measures of available resources and assessments of limits to the capacity to absorb impacts" (UNEP 2011), could be an underestimation.

The climate change debate, where the IPCC 4th Assessment Report from 2007 stated that the climate change was created by the rich countries but it was the poor countries that were going to pay the price, clearly pointed to the global injustice. The poor countries were not only by being denied the right to (conventional) development but were also being forced to adapt to the impact of the inevitable changes. The COP 15 in Copenhagen revealed the demise of the old North-South hegemony as the developing countries were no longer willing to accept the agenda put forward by the rich countries, and newly industrializing countries like China, India, Brazil, South Africa etc., demanded their contribution and influence to be acknowledged in a new world order. The quest for a new world order by the big newly industrializing countries was obviously backed by their economic power due to rapid industrialisation and exploitation of natural resources to satisfy the worldwide increasing consumerism, which they themselves have become part of. This situation

creates two new scenarios, namely the rapidly increasing global resource use and environmental impacts and secondly the opportunities for revived development within the changing world order.

By briefly reviewing above the post II World War concept of development from its cradle in the development epoch until today, these two new scenarios request an urgent need to redefine the concept of development and to revitalize development studies to analyse how it could be implemented. Tim Jackson's 2009 book somehow summarises the many concerns of rampant utilization of natural resources and its environmental impacts, not least on the concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere and other life supporting ecosystems.

From 1950 to today the world economy has grown about 6 times and if it continues at the same rate it will be 80 times bigger in 2100 than in 1950. If all are going to enjoy the average affluence of the OECD countries today with an estimated global population of 9 billion in 2050 the economy should be 15 times the size of today's economy (75 times what it was in 1950) and 40 times bigger in 2100 than it is today. As the ecological footprint is presently estimated at 1.3 global hectares, it's hard to imagine even the biggest technological optimist would argue that such an economy is still within a finite world. (Jackson 2009), p. 13f)

Tim Jackson has calculated the need for mankind's ingenuity and technological development to sustain the forecasted growth in resource consumption and pollution:

"If we're really serious about fairness and want the world's 9 billion people all to enjoy an income comparable with EU citizens today, the economy would need to grow 6 times between now and 2050, with income growing at an average rate of 3.6% a year. Achieving IPCC's emission targets in this world means pushing down the carbon intensity of output by 9% every single year for the next 40 or so years. By 2050, the average carbon intensity would need to be 55 times lower than it is today at only 14gCO₂/USD." (Jackson 2009), p. 80f)

Tim Jackson continues by mentioning that the 55 times increase in technological intensity is on the condition that the incomes in the developed nations do not increase further. If we imagine a realistic 2% income increase per year up to 2050 it means that the carbon intensity per produced monetary unit must be 130 times lower than it is today (ibid. p. 81)

Despite previous successes in overcoming ecological constraints due to the ingenuity of mankind and by big money backing eco-optimists to let the show go on, it is, as Tim Jackson says, beyond imagination that the planet can sustain the present Western production and consumer model democratically spread to 9-11 billion people by the middle of this Century. A 'human development/life satisfaction index' must subsequently be created that can be implemented democratically and globally and that is within what the planet's resources and ecosystems can sustain now and in the future.

Climate changes and the call for a new world order based in global justice

The second scenario is the changing world order that will relieve the North-South dependency syndrome based in the faith of linear development and kept in place by, provoking as Wolfgang Sachs puts it: 'the mixture of generosity, bribery and oppression which has characterized the North-South relationship' (Sachs 2010), p. xv). This will open for the possibilities of the developing countries defining their own ways of progress and ways to cope with environmental constraints, including adaptation to impacts of enhanced climate variability and extremes. In this there is need to revitalise development studies that must include economics that takes its point of departure in the

capacities of global ecosystems and the ecological foundation of an economic system that allocates resources for production and consumption. The challenges lying ahead for this will be summarised in the section on the need to re-conceptualise development below.

As Wolfgang Sachs describes it, the traditional dominance of the North over the South was based on carbon and colonies (Sachs 2007). In the short version, the Western world created its wealth and power based on the technology of using fossil fuels for its industrialisation and collected the raw materials for the industrial production in the colonies. This model can obviously not be replicated and spread democratically to the rest of the world.

“In other words, the model is structurally incapable of justice, so it is unwise to look at industrial patterns of production and consumption as we know them, as a standard for equity. It is difficult to see how the automobile society can be democratised across the world; it is difficult to see how chemically dependent agriculture can be replicated; it is difficult to see how a meat-based system can be generalised. The resources required for extending and democratising this kind of wealth are too vast, they are too expensive, and they are too damaging for local and global ecosystems” (Sachs 2007), p. 37)

Apart from running out of fossil fuels, the democratic way of burning fossil fuels equally to the Western world (and now the emerging economies), will contribute to what Wolfgang Sachs is calling the climate chaos.

Climate change issues have up to the Stern Review of 2006 and the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 merely been seen as an issue of rich countries’ mitigation measures to reduce on greenhouse gas emissions and climatological models forecasting impact scenarios of climate changes. Later, in what IIED calls the third era, starting around 2007, climate changes are perceived in a new way. Now it’s no longer just an environmental issue, or even an environment and development issue, but one of global justice or, more correctly, injustice. One group of people, namely the rich people, mainly in the rich developed world, had caused the problem and one group of people, namely the poor in the developing world are going to pay the price (Huq, Saleemul, Toulmin, Camilla 2006). The emerging economies are now blurring that dichotomy that was clear by the end of the cold war, but are hereby also increasing the problem for the poorer countries to adapt.

Climate change is one global environment-development issue where it is somehow straight forward to calculate costs and benefits. The costs of carbon driven development have since the start of industrialisation been accumulated on the deficit account of concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. As it’s agreed in the UNFCCC COP process that average global temperatures should not increase more than two degrees Celsius, it is easy to calculate a globally equal share of that account as China tried during the unsuccessful COP 15 negotiations in Copenhagen⁶. But whether an average global increase of two degrees Celsius is an appropriate threshold is definitely not certain. As the temperatures are increasing much faster at the poles, even a lower threshold might still create unpredictable disturbances in global ecosystems⁷. The situation is similarly with

⁶ What is easy is of course only the simple idea of development that since the start of industrialisation has been pursued through burning of fossil fuels, that is reflected in the accumulation of GHG in the atmosphere. The actual principles on what, when and how to measure and count is obviously complicated and prone to difficult political compromises due to historically vested interests.

⁷ The IPCC states in their 5th Assessment Report that the accumulation of GHG in the atmosphere is happening much faster than anticipated and the possibility of remaining within a 2C average temperature increase is highly doubtful.

other critical ecosystems. According to a number of concerned environmentalists, more than half of the world's wetlands have been lost since 1900. Bio-diversity is decreasing drastically and some 23% of usable land surface has undergone extensive degradation. Water resources are drying out, natural forest are dwindling rapidly and many fishing ground are being over fished, questioning the survival of many life supporting ecosystems (Sachs 2007). While the old debate on limits to growth argued on the depletion of resources with continued economic growth did not sufficiently incorporate the ingenuity of man and the capitalistic system that invented technologies that allowed resource extraction under extreme environmental conditions and made it economically rational to exploit them despite the ecological costs. Also the new concerns of overloading the atmosphere and other ecosystems to the point of their break down will be challenged by technological development like extracting and storing green house gasses underground. However, we don't know the threshold of different ecosystems and in most cases the impacts of deterioration of ecosystems will appear as slowly deterioration of life quality that will appear much faster among the poor and vulnerable people and communities than among the rich and political influential.

“The truth is that there is as yet no credible, socially just, ecological sustainable scenario of continually growing incomes for a world of 9 billion people. In this context, simplistic assumptions that capitalism's propensity for efficiency will allow us to stabilize the climate or protect against resource scarcity are nothing short of delusional” (Jackson 2009, p. 86)

The rapidly growing consumerism in the emergent economies, adding to the relentlessly growing quest for more material goods in the 'old world', leads us to the challenge of re-conceptualizing development in a way that it will stand for human life satisfaction within the limits of a finite world in terms of natural resources endowments and the survival of life-supporting ecosystems. It is of course the populations in both the rich, emerging and poor economies that (by necessity as natural disasters occur more frequently due to the breakdown of life supporting ecosystems) should define their new development concept, but development researchers have a major responsibility in creating awareness of the urgency and guiding the process that will redirect our attention from discussing development only in the poor developing world context. There is a major urgency in pointing at the need to redefine development and welfare in the rich developed (and emerging) economies that will allow making the world a more hospitable place for all its citizens. Let me hint at a few points facing that challenge in the following section.

The need to re-conceptualize development and revitalise development studies

The global architecture is under constant change. The Asian Tigers (South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia) were as poor and undeveloped (i.e. maintained their traditional societies) as the African continent at the beginning of the development epoch. The same goes for the new players in the emerging global order, like China, Brazil, and India. The concept of development has changed radically from the colonial period to the development epoch during the cold war and again to the epoch of globalisation, and post-development. Although post-development theories made a strong claim that development - understood as human progress and increased material welfare - didn't materialise in the developing world in general, it missed the challenge of pointing at sustainable alternatives. Many post-development theorists agree to that and Nustad emphasises the usefulness of post-development theories in pointing out the premises on which development interventions are based do not hold, even though it does not have a future

programme (Nustad 2001)⁸. The neo-liberal epoch of globalization and its focus on economic growth that resulted in increasing inequalities (Kaplinsky 2005), entirely neglected the concept of development as the market, in their belief, automatically will strive after macro-economic equilibrium. The increasing population and rapidly growing global consumerism together with deteriorating ecosystems, resource depletion and accumulation of GHG in the atmosphere, strongly call for the need of the concept of development to be radically redefined in the new epoch that is now emerging. According to Wolfgang Sachs, the dilemma of the twenty-first century is: “politics is compelled to push either equity with ecology or ecology without equity and it’s hard to see how this dilemma can be resolved unless the belief in development is dismantled” (Sachs 2010). The dilemma must imply that development being defined as ‘sufficiency livelihood’ that can democratically be shared among the rich developed countries, the emerging economies and the poor developing countries. While the market economy can be an efficient tool in technological innovations needed for decoupling of economic growth from resource depletion and environmental impacts, global popular participation in the political process is pertinent of enforcing the principle of precaution vis-à-vis uncertainty of environmental thresholds and non-reversal ecological processes as well as the concept of sufficiency livelihoods. I shall explain these concepts further below.

Thandika Mkandawire in an earlier article in FDS (Mkandawire 2008) discussed the role of social sciences in formulating the next development agenda with the aim of integrating democracy and social inclusion with development as a need for a truly interdisciplinary agenda through creative exploitation of the intellectual synergies of the specialised disciplines to address the pertinent issues transgressing the disciplinary borders. The present article has argued for the need to broaden the concept of democratization to include equity in human needs satisfaction, which then challenges a finite world in terms of ecological resources, unless the concept of development is changed.

I suggest three main avenues to pursue in order to create a development model that can be democratically spread to a growing global population within an ecological finite planet and hence gradually allow us to define an all-embracing new concept of development. The first avenue to follow is appealing to natural and technical sciences and the industrial entrepreneurs to develop technologies that will allow for a necessary lift in material production of basic necessities in order to eradicate poverty and care for a growing population by decoupling the material production from resource use and environmental impacts. During the 20th century the extraction of construction materials grew by a factor 34, ores and minerals by a factor of 27, fossil fuels by a factor of 12 and biomass by a factor of 3.6 (UNEP 2011). With close to one billion people not getting food enough and approximately the same number not having access to electricity, shelter, clean water and toilet facilities, and that number foreseen to grow substantially within the next four decades, there is a legitimate request for better material welfare for the poorest segments of the world population. In 1998 the richest 20% of the world’s population were responsible for 86% of the world’s consumption, while the poorest 20% had to settle for just 1.3% (ibid p. xvi). The International Resource Panel, being part of the Green Economy Initiative of UNEP has in a recent report lined up the challenges for technological innovations to decouple the needed increase in material production from environmental impacts (UNEP 2011). The fact, however, is that during the period 1980 to 2002 the overall material intensity of the global economy declined from 2.1 tons per 1,000 USD to 1.6 tons or an increase in efficiency of 25% (ibid p. 73). These facts prompt Tim Jackson to conclude:

⁸ Aram Ziai has edited a good collection of articles giving an overview of post-development theories, including Nustad’s (Ziai 2007)

The simplistic assumptions that capitalism's propensity for efficiency will allow us to stabilize the climate or protect against resource scarcity are nothing short of delusional. Those who promote decoupling as an escape route from the dilemma of growth need to take a closer look at the historical evidence – and at the basic of arithmetic of growth (Jackson 2009)

Though Tim Jackson might very well be right in his pessimistic assessment, it's hard to see any alternative to the decoupling of an increased material production from environmental impacts.

The second avenue is to develop ecological economics as an alternative to conventional economics that is only concerned with production and distribution but not whether resources will still be available and whether environmental assimilation capacity of waste generated will be sufficient to avoid unmanageable environmental deterioration for future generations. This avenue calls for economists working together with environmentalists, such as biologists, geographers etc. I shall elaborate on that avenue below.

The third avenue calls for philosophers, psychologists, and educators in developing, in conjunction with the population in question, the concept of sufficiency and life satisfaction based more in spiritual and intrinsic values rather than material commodities. The big challenge for development scholars are that there is nothing new in pointing at overconsumption and need for spiritual values, as an alternative to materialistic consumption, for a good life. Already Socrates is claimed to have said when he came to the market in Athens: 'What an abundance of commodities.....that I don't need'. Buddhist scholars, some of whom call themselves Buddhist economists (see i.e. (Zsolnai 2008) have for long been grappling with the idea of supplementing the selfishness and competition of the market forces with concepts of altruism, compassion, solidarity and empathy⁹. Gandhi and numerous religious and populists leaders have promoted human values in resistance to raw market forces. What is, however, now a new situation, is that it's scientifically proven, to an extent that leaves little doubt, that the planet simply will not accommodate a continuation of the present volume of resource use and degradation of life supporting ecosystems, including the atmosphere to provide a stable climate. With this threat in mind, the human ingenuity will eventually provide solutions, but probably only when the decision makers themselves are threatened. As this is a global political battle, I suggest that we, as development scholars, promote a new normative concept of development that also points at sufficiency and frugality for those who already have enough. To accept sufficiency and frugality does not imply the need to suffer, but only to accept enough is enough in daily calorie intake, use of fossil fuels, clean water etc. But this calls for a change of mind set, especially in the most affluent developed countries and therefore calls for general educational programmes emphasising the diversity of life satisfaction that is not related to materialistic consumption.

Scientists, NGOs, some governments and private enterprises are already working on various green technologies including renewable energy and there is little doubt that those who bring these technologies first to the market will benefit substantially. There are not the same economic incentives in the second and third avenue and these should, therefore, be promoted by academics, NGOs and the young generations who before or later will realise the urgent necessity. Being a geographer I invite economists to contribute to the development of ecological economics, the necessity of which I shall now elaborate.

⁹ Schumacher was actually the one who in 1955 invented the term Buddhist Economy, see (Schumacher 1973)

Economics is an important subject in the interdisciplinary development studies that has so far been based in the idea of unlimited economic growth that will eventually spread democratically over the planet and as such create development. This implies that development, as a universal and linear idea of gradually bringing all societies into the world of mass consumption is unrealistic and must be declared redundant. The new definition must include ecological economics that, in opposition to mainstream economics, take point of departure in the endowment of ecological resources and capacities of ecosystems.

“For mainstream economists, the ‘whole’ is the human economy. Ecological economics, in contrast, insists that the human economy is but a component or subset of a larger Whole – namely the Earth, its atmosphere and its ecosystems. The larger system is finite and non-growing” (Babe 2006), p. 126)

At present, mainstream economics and the holistic ecosystem concept in ecology constitute fundamentally rival, even antithetical discourses or thought systems, even though their respective subjects – namely the economy and environment/ecosystems – are inextricably linked. Already the Brundtland Commission recognized this and stressed that environmental and economic problems must no longer be treated separately by fragmented institutions and policies. According to the Commission, ‘Economics and ecology must be completely integrated’ (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). Or as formulated by Robert Babe:

“Ecological economics integrates elements of economics, ecology, thermodynamics, ethics, and a range of other natural and social sciences to provide an integrated and biophysical perspective on environment-economy interactions” (Babe 2006), p. 132)

But mainstream economics, both post-Keynesianism and neo-liberal economics consider environmental issues as externalities or as stated by Tim Jackson: “Economics – and macro-economics in particular – is ecologically illiterate” (Jackson 2009), p. 123).

As Robert Babe writes, ecological economics is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the relationship between environment and society. With development studies having an advantage of being interdisciplinary studies of developing countries, it should join the aims of ecological economics by integrating the environmental issues in the analysis of societal development. This will emphasize development studies’ abilities of dealing with contextual and complex issues by acknowledging that the processes to reach sustainable systems of frugality and sufficiency in production and consumption are context specific. The important lesson is that the countries that have managed to escape extreme and widespread poverty have their own unique stories of development successes that to a very large degree are explained by dynamic internal factors promoted by a strong, interventionist state (contrary to the believe of the neo-liberalists) and external enabling environments¹⁰. According to Corbridge, “the post-development theories are radical because they call for new ways of looking at self and the world....that encourages people in the South and elsewhere to embrace a way of living – a good life – that is local and sustainable and not in tow to ‘the ordinary discourse of economics’ or ‘concepts of utility’” (Corbridge 1998). Development analyses must grasp the economic, social, cultural and political diversity and uniqueness of the development processes or as it has been expressed by Hubert Schmitz:

¹⁰ The emerging economies that have experienced rapid economic growth have done so with little considerations of the ecological consequences and with growing internal inequalities as a result(Palat 2009)

‘what most development studies researchers have in common is the need for analytical frameworks and concepts which capture the different stages, structures and attitudes in Africa, Latin America and Asia, different from those found in OECD countries and the concern to understand poverty and inequality and analyse its causes and show ways of improving people’s life chances’ (Schmitz 2007), p. 53)

Another pertinent ecology-economy nexus challenge is the unequivocal confirmation of climate change by the IPCC 4th Assessment Report from 2007. This now deems all societies to take into considerations their model of production and consumption in order to adapt to the inevitable increase in climate variability and extremes. Development studies needs to create new ways to think creatively about inter-linkages between resilience, vulnerability, adaptation and mal-adaptations (Boyd, Juhola 2009), p.796)

Conclusion

The climate changes and general deterioration of life supporting ecosystems and other environmental resources pose two major challenges to development studies, where the first one is of technical and ethical nature and hence appeals to the first and third avenue mentioned above. The first challenge is to transform the society into a low carbon economy with consumption based in frugality and sufficiency. This applies not least to the rich developed world. The second challenge is to adapt to the inevitable increasing variability and extremes in local climate conditions. This applies especially to the tropical Global South that will be hardest hit by the changes with least adaptive capacities. I think the scale of the impact of climate changes on future development deem it necessary to consider the impact on all future development and hence sharpen Boyd and Juhola’s statement from their article on opportunities in re-conceptualising development futures when they say: “that climate change issues should not be mainstreamed into every strand of development studies, but the development community should be urged to re-conceptualise development theory that will truly focus on the understanding and theorisation of change in not just developing but developed countries as well (Boyd, Juhola 2009).

One serious obstacle to introducing ecological economics is that conventional economics build on the fundamental idea of the selfish ‘economic man’ who strives for maximum utility and for whom solidarity and compassion doesn’t exist, or expressed by Robert Babe: “In a similar way, neoclassical economics, by emphasising the purported beneficence of self-interests, obscures moral norms, communal values, empathy, and generosity (Babe 2006), p.30). Spreading democratically to a rapid growing world population a model of development based in sufficiency and frugality is not possible without a minimum of common human values, empathy and generosity from those who have accumulated material wealth during the previous epochs of development and left the price to be paid by those who are now living in and will be born to live in a world beyond conventional development.

The serious question that must be raised in all development communities is whether the present challenges of democratically spreading the dominant capitalistic production and consumption model globally is indeed possible with a 50% larger population by the mid of this Century or whether this is another try by eco-pessimists to block for human ingenuity and healthy entrepreneurship? I believe, as does IPCC, UNEP, World Watch Institute and a vast number of other institutions and concerned academics that it’s hard to believe that this will be possible. Too much evidence argues against it! In that case the development communities have a serious challenge of re-conceptualizing the concept of development and revitalize development studies to globally create the necessary

awareness among the population and their politicians to implement it. My humble aim with this article has been to urge us to get started.

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